

2015

From the Editor

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Mahn, Jason A. (2015) "From the Editor," *Intersections*: Vol. 2015: No. 41, Article 3.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol2015/iss41/3>

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From the Editor

Training for “leadership” is so ubiquitously heralded in higher education as to become almost meaningless. Institutions nationwide create leadership development programs for their students, and leadership itself is one of the fastest growing fields in American higher education, from residential colleges to on-line education to doctoral programs. Employers, we are told, look to hire students with “leadership skills.” To meet demand, there are leadership labs, programs, certificates, retreats, majors, emphases within majors, and countless other ways to credential students as leaders. If in Lake Wobegone all the children are above average, in college they must be a good deal higher than that.

The pervasiveness of would-be leaders would be a contradiction in terms (or worse, would cultivate an upward-bound rat-race, where second from the top means failure) if leadership really meant being on top and in control and having no one to answer to. I fear it is often so in our dominant culture. Whether it’s Donald Trump wagging his finger at Hollywood has-beens on television, Oprah giving things away, or presidential candidates looking “electable,” we are inundated with images of leadership that fascinate and even inspire but rarely empower and almost never serve. If they represent all that leadership means, many of us would be authentically called *away* from it.

Martin Luther had a different understanding of leadership. Because Christ led and leads others by serving them—as the early Christ-hymn puts it, by becoming “a slave”—followers of Christ also are called to lives of self-giving service, to the point where “my learning is not my own; it belongs to the unlearned and it is a debt I owe to

them...[and where] my wisdom belongs to the foolish, my power to the oppressed” (*Luther’s Work*, Vol. 27, 393).

Lutheran colleges and universities are no longer places where Lutherans alone, or Christians alone, work and learn. Our missions now go beyond the training of future pastors and teachers to tend to the needs of German or Scandinavian immigrants. Still, our different institutional DNAs continue to carry forward a shared mission to train servant-leaders—those who lead by serving and serve by leading. Witness the pairing in many of our mission statements of “leading” and “leadership” with language of responsibility, service, citizenship, community, justice, participation, purpose, and care.

Essays by Jodock, Neilson, Ngunjiri, Hasseler, and Johnson in this issue of *Intersections* were first delivered at the 2014 Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference at Augsburg College under the theme, “The Vocation of Leadership: What does this Mean?” They flesh out what leadership might mean among students, faculty, administration, and staff on our campuses. The shorter essay by Hughes, the creative reflections of Warren, and the book review by Hanson and Crowe also call us back to our central gifts and tasks. I thank each author for her or his wisdom and care, and for readers of *Intersections* for sustaining this ongoing conversation about the vocation of ELCA colleges and universities.

